

Deseret News

Hatch, Bishop blame Demos for high oil prices

Both parties increase finger-pointing over costs

By **Lee Davidson**

Deseret News

Published: July 24, 2008

WASHINGTON — Who is to blame for high oil prices? Sen. Orrin Hatch and Rep. Rob Bishop, both R-Utah, say the answer is simple: the Democrats.

Sen. Bob Bennett, R-Utah, doesn't go that far. But he says Democratic bills and maneuvers in Congress would do little or nothing to lower prices, while Republican bills would. Of course, Democrats are also busy blaming Republicans.

That came in an especially partisan day in Congress on Wednesday as both parties stepped up the finger-pointing over high gasoline prices, as the chance of passing something to lower them seemed to dwindle before Congress' upcoming August recess.

Hatch and Bennett joined a long parade of Republican senators calling for measures to allow more exploration and drilling, while Democrats called for more control of oil speculation. Disagreements over what to allow stalled votes on all bills and even halted appropriations bills on energy matters.

Meanwhile on the House side, Bishop praised a new House GOP energy bill that incorporates some provisions he has been pushing and also took some swipes at Democrats.

Hatch told the Senate, "When the Democrats took over Congress, they immediately began dismantling every effort to develop oil from oil shale, oil sands and coal to liquids, even though they knew full well that we have more oil in those resources than all the rest of the world combined."

He added, "It is very clear that most extreme environmental groups have an anti-oil agenda, and it is just as clear that the Democrats have adopted that agenda as their energy platform. It's a recipe for disaster."

Hatch said he has no problem with debating the impact of speculation on oil prices, as Democrats want, "but it is no substitute for providing our people with the transportation fuels they need."

Bennett said eliminating congressional bans on oil shale development or drilling in the outer continental shelf would do far more to lower prices than restricting speculation in the oil markets.

"What are the expectations of investors right now with respect to oil? It is their expectation that the price of oil will go up. It is very rational," he said. But if more drilling is allowed and hope grows for expanded U.S. supplies, "Expectations will change," and prices would lower.

Bishop praised a new "all-of-the-above" energy legislation that the House GOP leadership introduced Wednesday to incorporate a wide

array of ideas to improve energy supplies and prices, and noted that it adopted many of the provisions he has been pushing in a bill for the GOP's Western Caucus.

In an e-mailed newsletter to Davis County Republicans, Bishop lashed out at congressional Democrats.

"Since June the Democrat leaders have cancelled sessions, stopped work on pretty much all the appropriations bills and only allowed floor votes on bills where there is a limit on amendments and none can be about energy issues," Bishop said.

"Democrat leaders of Congress (in contrast to several rank and file, frustrated Democrats) have refused to even address any aspect of our energy crisis," Bishop said.

While not a vocal part of the loud debates on Wednesday, Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, has been pushing a bill to better regulate oil speculators who try to evade U.S. oversight by dealing in foreign exchanges.

Also, Rep. Chris Cannon, R-Utah, who was defeated in a primary, has said he is using his remaining days largely to push a bill that would make obtaining permits for oil shale development easier. He also said, however, he worries nothing may pass amid the election-year partisan battles.

E-mail: lee@desnews.com

© 2008 Deseret News Publishing Company | All rights reserved